

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 HA-05 /076 W

-----021082 292253Z /63

R 291053Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7611

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 03027

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: SHUM IR

SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS: ASHUR BANIPAL BABILA

1. PRESS ANNOUNCED MARCH 27 THAT WARRANT FOR ARREST OF SUBJECT HAD BEEN ISSUED IN TEHRAN COURT FOR FAILURE TO APPEAR IN COURT TO ANSWER CHARGES ON COMPLAINT "IN DEFENSE OF PUBLIC MORALITY". AS OF MARCH 29, WARRANT HAD NOT RPT NOT BEEN SERVED. CHARGES WERE FILED BY RESURGENCE PARTY CHAPTER AFTER RECENT BABILA EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AT CITY GALLERY WHICH INCLUDED NUDE PICTURES OF HIMSELF. PRESS MARCH 28 ANNOUNCED THAT AFTER AUTHORITIES HAD SEEN "FINAL" REHEARSAL OF HIS PLAY "THE MASSACRE" WHICH WAS TO BE PRESENTED AT CITY THEATRE, APRIL 16, PROGRAM WAS CANCELLED. CITY THEATRE STAFF EXPECTS HIM TO SHOW UP FOR REHEARSAL MARCH 30, HOWEVER, AND STATUS OF PLAY REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

2. BABILA IS PROMINANT AND POPULAR STAGE DIRECTOR IN HIS 30'S WHO WORKS WITH THE AVANT GARDE NATIONAL IRANIAN RADIO AND TELEVISION (NIRT) DRAMA WORKSHOP. HE HAS PRESENTED PLAYS AT THE PAST TWO SHIRAZ FILM FESTIVALS AND HAS PARTICIPATED IN SEVERAL PROGRAMS AT THE IRAN-AMERICAN SOCIETY. HE IS NON-POLITICAL AND HAS NEVER BEEN A DISSIDENT TO OUR KNOWLEDGE. HE IS REPUTED TO BE A HOMOSEXUAL. HIS
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PRODUCTIONS HAVE FEATURED AN EXTENSIVE AMOUNT OF SYMBOLIC SEXUALITY, AND IT IS THIS ASPECT OF HIS WORK WHICH HAS MADE HIM CONTROVERSIAL AND PRESUMABLY LED VERY CONSERVATIVE (AND PROBABLY RELIGIOUS) IRANIANS TO COMPLAIN ABOUT HIS PICTURE EXHIBITION. (FYI: WE UNDERSTAND THAT IN PAST NIRT'S MANAGING DIRECTOR REZA QOTBI HAS HAD OCCASION TO INTERVENE WITH AUTHORITIES IN BEHALF OF SEVERAL WRITERS

IN WORKSHOP BECAUSE OF AVANT GARDE NATURE OF THEIR WORKS.)

3. EMBASSY COMMENT: WHILE SITUATION SMACKS OF TEMPEST
IN TEAPOT, IT UNDERLINES PROBLEM OV VIEWING IRANIAN SCENE
IN TERMS OF WESTERN CIVIL RIGHTS CONCEPTIONS. BABILA
WILL PROBABLY NOT RPT NOT G JAIL, OR EVEN TO TRIAL,
IF QOTBI'S INFLUENCE PREVAILS. RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES,
HOWEVER, SHOCKED BY HIS EXHIBIT AND PERHAPS BY HIS LIFE-
STYLE, HAVE INVOKED THAT IT WAS RESURGENCE PARTY CHAPTER THAT
FILED SUIT HAS NO POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE: THERE WAS
FUNDAMENTALISTS IN THE PARTY AS ELSEWHERE.
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